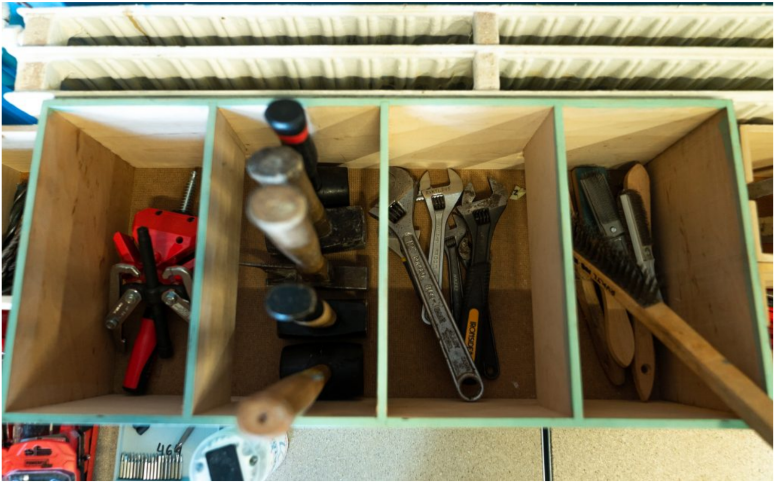
**The modern sharing economy has grown by leaps and bounds in the last few years as an ever-increasing number of capitalism's subjects slip out from under its umbrella. Democratic spaces, like the Reykjavík Tool Library, are touted as a major part of this movement—one which minimizes waste by cutting consumption and offering visitors learning opportunities and open access.**



Though they're not new in and of themselves (the first one was started in 1976 in Ohio), the concept of a tool library has been reinvented several times, and in the modern day these libraries have developed into community hubs that offer workshops, events, and a relatively new kind of space called a "makerspace."

"We run a monthly Repair Cafe," founder Anna C W de Matos said. "We invite people who actually work as electricians, teachers, etc., to volunteer. They repair the things people bring, and teach them [...] what's happened to their objects and how to fix and maintain them."

De Matos' desire to transform the tool library into a place for knowledge exchange and the common good is counter to the goals of Iceland's glutted Airbnb market; whereas Airbnb operators often buy properties to let at a premium, the tool library works to keep costs low by offering yearly memberships that suit individual needs.

The Reykjavik Tool Library “aim[s] to become a learning hub […] to create a community of people that will repair rather than throw away.”

The Reykjavík Tool Library’s democratic practice is out of sync with the dominant market logic. It’s not simply a place for people to borrow tools; it’s a social institution that creates opportunities to learn and to find companionship in other students, other creators.

## Take, Make, Waste

The Reykjavík Tool Library gives access to finite goods that may otherwise be prohibitively expensive as either a single or a recurrent expense. It encourages users to consider what they really need—and what they only need to borrow.

According to the Tool Library’s management, its economic model is rooted in the sharing economy, which concerns what we *do* with goods during their lifetime. And they’ve alluded to their underlying goal to create a small circular economy, which relates to how those goods are manufactured and taken apart for reuse as new goods.

> ***In the current, “take, make, waste” system, resources are extracted from the environment, converted into products with finite life cycles, then disposed of, with a low recovery rate.***

In its lack of regard for the damage inflicted by mass production, this scheme underpins a practice of unhinged entitlement.

REYKJAVIK TOOL LIBRARY
ARCTIC SURFERS

The sharing of goods, on the other hand, measures value in time, not money. At the Reykjavík Tool Library, patrons pay a yearly flat rate to use tools for a finite amount of time (currently, 3-7 days) before handing them off to new users.

## Tools Against Inflation

The library provides economic and environmental benefits alongside social infrastructure. Access isn't a measurement of personal wealth, but one of institutional investment in individual welfare.

Sharing economies impede high investments with short-term impacts—buying a tool you'll only use once— as a prerequisite of economic participation.

The Reykjavík Tool Library has either purchased or received tools from outside sources, but rather than procuring en masse and reselling at a high price, they offer a service wherein customers pay for the use of tools, not the tools themselves.

Companies generate a continuous revenue stream without additional purchasing costs; consumers, on the other hand, only pay for what they need.

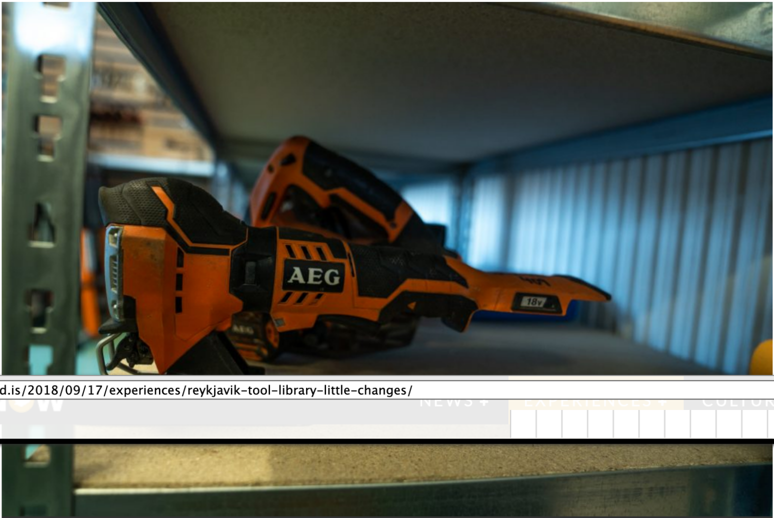
## Waste

And the complementarity of the sharing and circular economies offers an elegant, albeit elaborate, solution to a stagnant problem that's long been incentivized by a social system that prioritizes purchasing power over all else: waste.

While the circular economy aims to increase resources through recycling and reuse on a massive scale, the sharing economy has the potential to extend the life cycle of products by reframing 'products' as 'services.'

According to a 2014 report by the European Commission, in a single year, 8 billion tonnes of materials were processed into energy or goods in the EU alone. The end result was 1.5 billion tonnes of waste (only .6 billion tonnes were recycled).

Those rather dramatic figures expose the need for a systemic change across the economy, in all products and services.



Practices like "adaptive remanufacturing," — a term coined to describe the process by which a product at the end of its life is used to create a similar, but not identical, product — are integral to such an economy.

When we speak about an economic change of this scale, we're speaking of preserving the *value* of products—through lighter use, sharing, and other strategies. Instead of tossing goods out, companies simply update obsolete products.

"The transition to a circular economy is a tremendous opportunity to transform our economy and make it more sustainable," the report says.

Institutions like the Reykjavík Tool Library—examples of living democratic culture—represent a small beginning for economic and social transformation. The seed, if you will, that can burgeon into something larger.